# The Mouse That Charmed: An Evening with Kim Darby

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Sam Weisberg July 16, 2014

Kim Darby in “True Grit,” 1969

When I called the now-retired actress Kim Darby at her California home a few months ago–to discuss her more obscure 1960s and 1970s work–she apologized (needlessly) for having taken a few days to free up her schedule. Her sister was in town, she explained, and her house was a total mess. Dishes were piled up in her sink, and she worried she’d have to end the call early to tend to them. Darby did nothing of the sort. Instead, about midway through the call, she began doing the dishes while keeping me on speakerphone.

Such charmingly OCD behavior is the essence of Kim Darby. Many of her roles are flooded with self-doubt and anxiety, a key ingredient in what rendered her such an approachable-seeming screen sweetheart during her heyday in the late 1960s and 1970s. While the role that put her on the map–the spunky tomboy Mattie Ross, who held her own against John Wayne’s growling, boozing, eyepatch-wearing US Marshal Rooster Cogburn in the original “True Grit”–doesn’t seem to embody these temperaments, Darby allows traces of heartrending vulnerability to peek through.

Ironically, Darby, who was a 22-year-old trying to pass for 14 in “True Grit,” registers as more child-like than actual teenager Hailee Steinfeld’s Mattie does in the Coen Brothers’ 2010 remake. This is partially due to the Coens’ hewing more religiously to novelist Charles Portis’ original text than earlier “Grit” director Henry Hathaway. The dialogue in the latter version is wordier, and Mattie sounds more like a Harvard-educated speechwriter than an Old West teen. But there’s also the quaking, breathy manner in which Darby plays Mattie. She’s brave, in many regards, for embarking on such a dangerous journey (to avenge her father’s death),

but every time she raises her voice to Wayne (who according to Darby was just as intimidating off-screen as on), she appears to be tapping all her reserves of strength to do so. This is no cartoon tomboy, no invincible kid. She's still frightened by her uncouth elders, even as she stands up to them.

Even before "True Grit," Darby had shown a real capacity for range, all while maintaining her trademark vulnerability. Two mid-1960s films not available on Netflix are **"Bus Riley's Back in Town,"** in which she plays the doting, wholesome sister of a drifter returned from war, and the Billy Graham-backed "those darned teens" polemic **"The Restless Ones,"** in which she plays a decidedly *un*wholesome, booze-swilling adolescent. Her work in the latter film is electrifying; she's sassy and mean, chuckling at her alcoholic mother's pathetic attempts to raise her. But again, beneath her self-contained exterior lies a veneer of deep-seated pain. To my astonishment, Graham does not condescend to her character, who ends up pregnant and disgraced; only at the end does he insultingly brush aside her fate, focusing instead on the preachy, pedestrian storyline about a clean-cut boy's flirtation with sin.

It's unfortunate that, post-"Grit," filmmakers ignored the brassier side of Darby's screen persona and focused mainly on her vulnerable elements. Hollywood wanted Darby to be an ingenue, and so they pushed her into more one-dimensional roles, usually the impressionable girlfriends of exceptional youths (Bruce Davison's campus radical in the 1970 drama **"The Strawberry Statement,"** Pete Duel's hippie, hellbent on delivering Darby's baby via a home-birth in **"Generation,"** a year earlier) or well-mannered, genteel girls taming devil-may-care men (Henry Winkler in the 1978 comedy **"The One and Only,"** Glen Campbell in the 1970 road picture "**Norwood."**) In her second most well-known film, **"The Grissom Gang**," she's simply a pretty damsel-in-distress, simultaneously terrorized and romanced by the dimmest member of a kidnapping family. (Many times throughout the interview, Darby said she was grateful, later in her career, to be cast in roles where she "didn't have to cry.")

Still, that vulnerability proved to be a haunting facet. When Kim Darby is in pain, the audience is in pain. Out of all the Kim Darby films I watched, the most difficult one to sit through was "The One and Only," in which the usually likable Henry Winkler plays a college drama major/cad who cannot, will not leave the bookworm coed Darby alone. He ignores her statement that she has a boyfriend; he stalks her; he embarrasses her on dates with off-key singing and actor impersonations; he throws her out of a car–twice–on the same date when she rebuffs him; he talks incessantly of his own brilliance, even while failing at his career. And yet Darby marries this insufferable nitwit. The lines in then-30-year-old Darby's face aren't from age; they're from mental exhaustion at trying to make sense of her weak, humorless, nonsensical character.

Darby would have played a similar role seven years earlier, in the Herman Raucher adaptation **"A Glimpse of Tiger**,**"** as the eccentric but generally well-adjusted girlfriend of Elliott Gould's freewheeling, grandiose con man, but, as will be discussed in more detail in a

later Hidden Films entry, that project was never completed. The real Darby is no pushover; she'd have thrown clownish men like these into the street–albeit with a squeaky apology or two. (Darby did, in real life, have a succession of dysfunctional, often tragic relationships with intense young actors, which, along with her lengthy dependency on amphetamines, she has been refreshingly candid about in interviews.)

From the 1980s through the 2000s, Darby's screen appearances were few and far between, but sometimes memorably kooky–most notably as John Cusack's mother in **"Better Off Dead,"** a cooing nutjob that cooks slimy food, provides gift-wrapped TV dinners at Christmas and remains totally oblivious to her lovesick son's suicide attempts. In the lamentable **"Teen Wolf Too"** (the laziest theatrical release of all time), she plays a college professor that sprouts a fox tail in the final frame. The rest of her late career work was mostly in straight-to-video releases, most of which are on Netflix (or were at one time) and only a few of which I watched (such as the hysterically gauche Michael Rooker action caper **"NewsBreak**").

During our conversation–which was occasionally interrupted by her feisty dog Lily–Darby discussed her displeasure with her performance in "Grit" and other films, her distaste for auditions and the sorry conditions for actresses in her age group today (but fret not: she's also happy about a few things!)

"Bye Bye Birdie" (1963) was Darby's screen debut. She's somewhere in this crowd scene.

**Sam Weisberg:** I read that when you were a child dancer/performer, your stage name was Derby Zerby. I'm wondering when you decided to change your name and why you picked Kim Darby.

**Kim Darby:** Well, it was very hard at my age to live with Derby Zerby. The kids in school made fun of me as it was at the end of the [alphabet], it came last. It was awful. The prettiest girl at school was named Kim, so I picked Kim. Derby and Darby are very similar, and Derby in England is Darby, so I picked that.

**SW:** I just watched “Bye Bye Birdie”–

**KD:** Oh, you didn’t have to do that, I’m not even in it.

**SW:** I was trying to figure out which scene you were in.

**KD:** Did you see me with the red bow? It’s when he [Comrade Birdie] comes to town and sings and all the townspeople are there. I have a little red bow on the side of my head.

**SW:** Did you want to shoot more musicals?

**KD:** No, I didn’t even have an agent then. I was just an extra dancer. My father taught dancing. He was really strict. If you look on my web site, you’ll see a picture of my parents, which is pretty wild. I didn’t like to dance and now I have two knee implants from dancing so much.

I wanted to act. I wanted to get out of my father’s dance school. I hated it so much and I didn’t like him at the time. All the popular kids in high school, at Van Nuys High, were in the drama department. I never got cast in any plays and neither did Marilyn Monroe, who went there. I was sort of the quietest girl in my class. When I started to work, I’d [be taught] on the set and be gone [from school] for eight or nine days. I’d come back to the classroom, and they didn’t know what to do. It just freaked them out. They stayed away from me. I wasn’t social in high school. I had many problems.

**SW:** Was acting the main thing that got you over that awkwardness?

**KD:** Yes, it was the main thing that saved my life.

**SW:** What was the pivotal moment where you decided you had to be an actress?

**KD:** It hit me when I watched the movie “The Miracle Worker” and I saw Patty Duke. I don’t know how many times I saw that movie. I was raised by my grandparents, my father’s parents, and I asked my grandmother if I could go to acting school. My father was raising me too and he wanted the exact opposite of what parents usually want. He wanted me in show business. He wanted me to dye my hair blonde at 13 and wear makeup. And, you know, he did stand back when I started to work. He didn’t think that I…he wasn’t unconditionally loving. He thought there was something wrong with me, that I didn’t look a certain way. I was a chubby teenager–not fat, but chubby. He didn’t like that. And I danced myself to death. So that was the first time that I had any sense of myself.

My grandmother took me to Desilu Studios, which is now Paramount. And there was a class there, and there was a really good teacher, Tony Barr. He told my grandmother, “I don’t take teenagers. This is an adult class. It goes ‘til 11 at night. There’s language here that…I mean, these are real grown-ups.” And she convinced him to look at me and he said, “OK, I’ll try it for two weeks.” I’m in his book, “Acting for the Camera,” and he describes me as a little mouse. When I did my first pantomime, this big smile came over his face. And the class respected me and they were all adults. And that’s when my life turned around. My agent at the time just happened to stop by my class and he asked my grandmother if I could go out on auditions. He said she’d have to go with me because I was underage. And I didn’t know how to read, so she would tell me the words.

**SW:** And this led to “Bye Bye Birdie”?

**KD:** No, it led to “Mr. Novak” [*NBC series that ran from 1963 to 1965*]. I did most of my work on episodic television at the beginning. And Hal Wallis saw me on “Run For Your Life” [*NBC, 1965-1968*] and he offered me “True Grit.”

**SW:** How did your grandparents end up being your caretakers?

**KD:** I wondered that for a long time and got a lot of different stories. But the truth was, I was in foster care, and I got really sick. I had a very bad ear and throat infection and I was losing my hearing, and they called my grandparents to come and get me. My mother did fight for custody, but the judge felt that neither my mother nor my father were capable of taking care of me. They just always told me that my mother didn’t love me and gave me up. That’s not a great thing to hear.

**SW:** They said the same thing about your dad?

**KD:** My dad was a very successful dancer. He was handsome. He had a lot of girlfriends. And my grandmother called him up and told him, “You need to come home and raise this little girl.” Well, that was the biggest mistake in my life. He didn’t want to come home. Why *should* he come home? My grandparents were doing a fine job. It’s just that my grandmother was so controlling she wanted control over him as well. The reason that I have any sanity at all was my grandfather Clyde. I loved him very much.

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**SW:** Was it sheer coincidence that only a year or two after "Birdie" you got to be in another movie with Ann-Margret? ["Bus Riley's Back in Town"] Did you strike up a friendship?

**KD:** No, I never shot a scene with her in "Bus Riley." And she was a movie star when I was a gypsy. I remember the director [Harvey Hart] was so madly in love with her.

**SW:** I got a kick out of seeing Michael Parks at such a young age. I have interviewed two directors who worked with him later and they said he was difficult. What was he like to work with back then?

**KD:** He was wonderful, with me.

**SW:** It seemed like Hollywood was trying to turn him into the next James Dean.

**KD:** Yes, and I got the feeling that he didn't like being under contract at Universal. He turned down a lot of stuff. He's real selective. I have to yell at my dog, just a second, I'm sorry. [*away from phone*] Lily. *Lily*! Stop!

**SW:** So overall you enjoyed working on "Bus Riley"?

**KD:** Yes, I did. I read for it and I remember being in a really good mood and perky, which I'm not usually, and I did a really good reading and got the part. [*pause*] I usually don't read very well at auditions. I'm dyslexic and I have severe learning disabilities.

“Everybody’s doing it!”: Kim Darby taunts the milquetoast Johnny Crawford in the Billy Graham-sponsored “The Restless Ones,” 1965

**SW:** How did you end up being cast in a Billy Graham movie?

**KD:** Well, it was just offered to me and I wanted to work and I never gave a thought as to whether I should do something or not. I hate the last scene in it. It’s very forced and it’s not authentic.

**SW:** I was disturbed by the ending because the movie is so punishing of your character. It’s a very sympathetic teenage character at first, when you find out her mom is a lonely alcoholic and that’s why she’s a troublemaker, and then you don’t even find out if she lives or dies, after her suicide attempt. All the sympathy shifts to the clean-cut boy she’s involved with. Was that in the original script or was it changed?

**KD:** I don’t think they cared to resolve that plot.

**SW:** Were you religious growing up?

**KD:** No.

**SW:** So it wasn’t really a religious set?

**KD:** No.

**SW:** Did you get to meet Billy Graham?

**KD:** I don't remember if I did or not.

**SW:** That movie had a profound influence on audiences. Apparently a lot of people converted to Christianity after watching it. Did you go to the premiere and see the effect it had on people?

**KD:** I don't think it had a premiere. I just went to a theater with my grandmother and watched it.

**SW:** I really liked your performance. I've seen three or four of Graham's movies and they're really bizarre. They're propaganda movies, so I was blown away that at least for awhile your character is a flesh-and-blood one, that generates a lot of sympathy. It's also the most rebellious character I've seen you play, so that must have been fun.

**KD:** It was fun. I was very confident. If you stay in the business long enough, your confidence just goes away, because it's just such a tough business. It's just brutal. I'm retired. I don't even go out on interviews or anything.

**SW:** Was it strange, having done that role, to play the polar opposite of that role in "The Last Best Sunday" [1999, available on Netflix], as a really religious mother?

**KD:** No, I just seemed to fit in that role and I wanted to do it badly. And Donny Most, who directed it, is the loveliest man in the whole world. He's just a darling, darling person. I had fun with it, and I can't say that very often. They used to hire me to cry. That's what they hired me for. And I just had a lot of those roles, where I was neurotic and a teenager. My emotions were very much on the surface because I was very young. But that was one of those times, like "Bus Riley," where I just rose to the occasion, because I trusted Don so much.

I find reading for a part to be absolutely awful. But in the last almost 30 years, they ask almost everybody to read. They're not gonna ask Cate Blanchett to read, but everyone else does.

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**SW:** You did get to do a few action movies. One was "The Karate Killers," the "Man from U.N.C.L.E." film.

**KD:** Yeah, I had a lot of fun doing that. They were always worried whether I could do comedy and I watched it once and I think I can. They released that as a feature in Europe and I guess it was on television here, I'm not sure. But people didn't get to see it much here.

**SW:** Were you involved with the TV show?

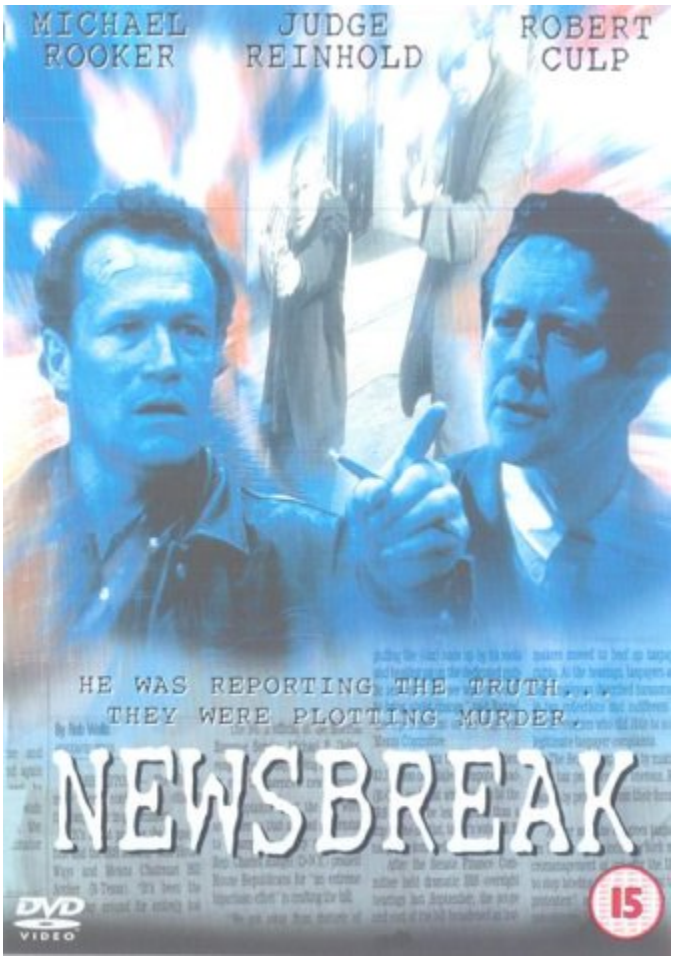
**KD:** No. They just offered it to me. David McCallum was so wonderful and so protective of me.

**SW:** I know it's set in five European cities. Did you get to shoot on location at all?

**KD:** No, we shot it all on the backlot of Universal.

**SW:** It looked like a lot of running around. Was it exhausting?

**KD:** No, I was young. Now is when I get exhausted, and overwhelmed.




**SW:** I saw “NewsBreak” [released to video in 2000, designated as “Saved” on Netflix], which is much more recent and is also an action film. You had to do a factory chase scene. Did you have fun on that one?

**KD:** Yeah. My knees weren’t hurting then.

**SW:** That is easily one of the craziest movies I’ve ever seen.

**KD:** Yeah. Nobody saw it.

The two Matties: Kim Darby with Hailee Steinfeld, 2010

**SW:** I read all your recent interviews about “True Grit,” around the time of the Coen Brothers remake. I know you told the famously temperamental Henry Hathaway to simply stop yelling at you and he was nice to you from there on out. Were you the first performer to be that direct with him?

**KD:** I don’t really know. I asserted myself in the most graceful way. But that was a rough time for me, which is no excuse. I don’t like my work in that. I was getting a divorce, I had just had a baby, and I had a blood clot. And my ex-husband [James Stacy}–I didn’t know this–hired my agent and made a deal [behind my back]. They [the producers] gave him quite a nice stipend for [hiring] me, and he just said to me, “You’re going to Colorado with the baby.” There was a nanny with me but I was not my whole self. I didn’t know what a wonderful role

that was. I didn't know anything about John Wayne, I was out of shape, and we were up 14,000 feet. It really took me three weeks to focus right. I'm in and out of focus in those scenes. I just don't like it.

**SW:** I don't agree.

**KD:** Did you see the remake?

**SW:** I did and I loved certain things about it. But some of the wordy dialogue–I don't know if it was that their script was wordier than in the original or that it sounded wordier coming out of Hailee Steinfeld. I didn't find your version wordy. The role seemed like a natural spunky tomboy.

**KD:** I think the Coens stayed very true to the book. In a film by Hal Wallis [the original version's producer], he's made "Casablanca"–you know, there was no way I could lose my arm in that movie. In the last couple of days, I've been rethinking, about when John Wayne gets me out of the pit and I have the rattlesnake bite. And I'm just sitting there with my head turned away. I should have asked somebody, "What is it like [to be bitten]?" But I was preoccupied with my husband. And I don't think Hal Wallis would have liked it if I was laying down and grabbing my stomach and feeling very sick. It was a Technicolor, big picture, for entertainment.

**SW:** I wanted to talk about John Wayne a little bit. Later on he turned out to have some very controversial views about Native Americans and equal opportunities for black people. He's known for his temper, too. But from your anecdotes I know he was eventually kind to you, so how did you feel when you found out some not-so-nice things about him later on?

**KD:** He was good to me. I made a lot of mistakes when I finished that movie and had a lot of press to do, because there were times I said I hated him and that I hated Henry. [*NOTE: Wayne's statements about Darby through the years were also inconsistent; in some biographies and interviews he called her the "lousiest actress" he ever worked with, while in others he said he admired her spunk*]. I never hated John. I never got to know him. We didn't talk. In my peer group I knew he was pro-war. I wasn't politically inclined but I knew my peers didn't like him. And I had no idea that he was a legend. [*whispering] I had no idea.* Now, I realize that the man was monumental.

I only [performed well in "True Grit"] in the boarding house scenes, which were the last we shot. I wasn't so worried about my baby and ex-husband. I can see my eyes sparkle.

**SW:** How did your rapport with Glen Campbell develop over the course of shooting "True Grit"?

**KD:** He was very sweet. Sometimes we'd have to drive around Palo Alto for two hours, where the location would be, and he would sing in the car. I would very much like to see him now. I feel for him. I think we wrote to each other on Facebook once.

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**SW:** Did Campbell bring you on board for "Norwood" or was it a sheer coincidence you ended up in that movie with him?

**KD:** I was committed to do five pictures for Hal Wallis. And that was one of them, and that was a real mistake. My agent at that time said, "We'll do the picture to thank Hal Wallis." You shouldn't do a picture for anybody unless it's what you want to do and you'll be happy doing it and you respect the text. And that just put me in a downward spiral.

**SW:** To me, it just seemed like a quirky, innocuous film. What bothered you about it?

**KD:** I just didn't like the way it was written. I did happen to see a scene from it a few years ago, where Glen is singing to me on the bus, and I'm stupidly coy and mannered. I just hated it.

I was offered a lot of movies I could have done and I should have picked one of those. I was offered "Panic in Needle Park" with Al Pacino. I had no vision of a career.

**SW:** What were the other films in that five-picture contract with Hal Wallis?

**KD:** The third picture was supposed to be “Red Sky at Morning,” which I should have done. *[NOTE: While Darby is credited for that film on imdb.com, the part actually went to Catherine Burns].* But there was a wonderful director named Robert Aldrich, who did “Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?” and he was doing this movie called “The Grissom Gang.” I was not right for it at all. That girl was supposed to be Drop. Dead. Gorgeous. She was supposed to be stunning. Well, that’s not me.

**SW:** But there’s an innocence about her. The simpleton in the gang [played by Scott Wilson] falls for her because of her sweetness. So I bought the role. You’re the one that was in it, though. Tell me why it didn’t work.

**KD:** My agent wanted me to do the film and not “Red Sky at Morning.” So I went in and met with Aldrich and his son was with him, and when I left, his son said, “She’s not right for it,” and Aldrich said, “I know she isn’t, but I think she’ll play the hell out of it.” I loved him so much. He was funny. He was a practical joker. The last scene of the movie, he had two cameras–and they never did that in those days–to keep me from having to do the shot over and over again. He had a medium and a close-up shot [going at once]. I did the scene with Scott, who I adore. Few people have moved me, but Mr. Aldrich and Scott Wilson and my grandfather do. He had a very tasty career. He was very careful with what he did. The women in my peer group are struggling terribly. The men are soaring. Bruce Davison, Scott Wilson, they’re all soaring.

**SW:** Who are some of the actresses in your peer group?

**KD:** Meg Foster. Veronica Cartwright.

**SW:** I wanted to talk a little about “Generation,” which I loved.I got the DVD from ModCinema.com, which is an obscure movie web site, and the description on the back of the DVD actually puts the film down. They call it “pro-establishment” just because the hippie husband lets the “bourgeois” doctor help him with the breeched baby, during the home birth scene. And I didn’t think the movie was anti-hippie at all! It’s about the father and the son-in-law coming to understand each other’s strengths and weaknesses, and I thought it was a beautiful resolution. What did you think of it?

**KD:** I think the intentions were all there, certainly. George Schaefer was a wonderful director, a very kind man and president of the Directors’ Guild for like a dozen years, and the cast members were good. It just didn’t do any business. It was a Broadway play for a long time and I think that it just didn’t move [on-screen].

I loved [lead actor] David Janssen, because I had done two “Fugitive” [episodes] with him, and he was so funny, you have no idea. And of course [co-star] Pete Duel and I fell in love in that movie, for real. We were engaged and [*long pause*] I was not with him when that horrible incident happened *[Duel’s suicide on New Year’s Eve, 1971].*

I remember Pete was sitting next to me while I was having an interview, and I said, “I think it’d be great to have a baby at home!” And Pete came from a long line of physicians. And he rolled his eyes! I didn’t catch him doing that, I read it. That was how unaware I was. I would have died [doing a home birth]. I had a blood clot in my pelvis and the doctors didn’t discover it for days. I was in the hospital three weeks after the baby went home.

**SW:** I know you were married to Jim Westmoreland for a brief time, after being involved with Duel. But were you still in touch with him when that marriage ended?

**KD:** Well, here's what happened. I don't think I was over my [first] marriage. That [marriage to Westmoreland] was annulled. I was married to him for like three weeks and it was just a rebound. Pete and I, there was a distance between us. He drank, and he was so smart. He didn't have to do that. I think if he'd lived he'd be sober today. I called him up after [the divorce from] Westmoreland, and I just begged him to come back, and he wouldn't.

**SW:** I read big chunks of Pete Green's biography on Duel, and it sounded like you two at least kept in touch for awhile.

**KD:** Not so much, because he was going through a bad time. He really was anti-establishment, and being under contract at Universal was…I mean, he hated it. And…I'm trying to get back to this. He came to see me about two months before the incident. I think of this incident still, every day. He was a little bit out of control, he'd been drinking, and I didn't know what to do with that. I shouldn't have let him drive, but I didn't know [what to do]. And, I don't know, I guess he was saying goodbye to me. He came over unannounced, and I was on my plight downward too, because after "True Grit" there was a lot of pressure put on me. And I let it happen to me, but I was so young, and the business was full of men at that time, and they wanted me to lose weight. And I got an addiction, just like Judy Garland, to uppers and downers.

**SW:** Amphetamines?

**KD:** Yeah. I never drank. I never partied. I just did those all on my own. And I went down to 72 pounds.

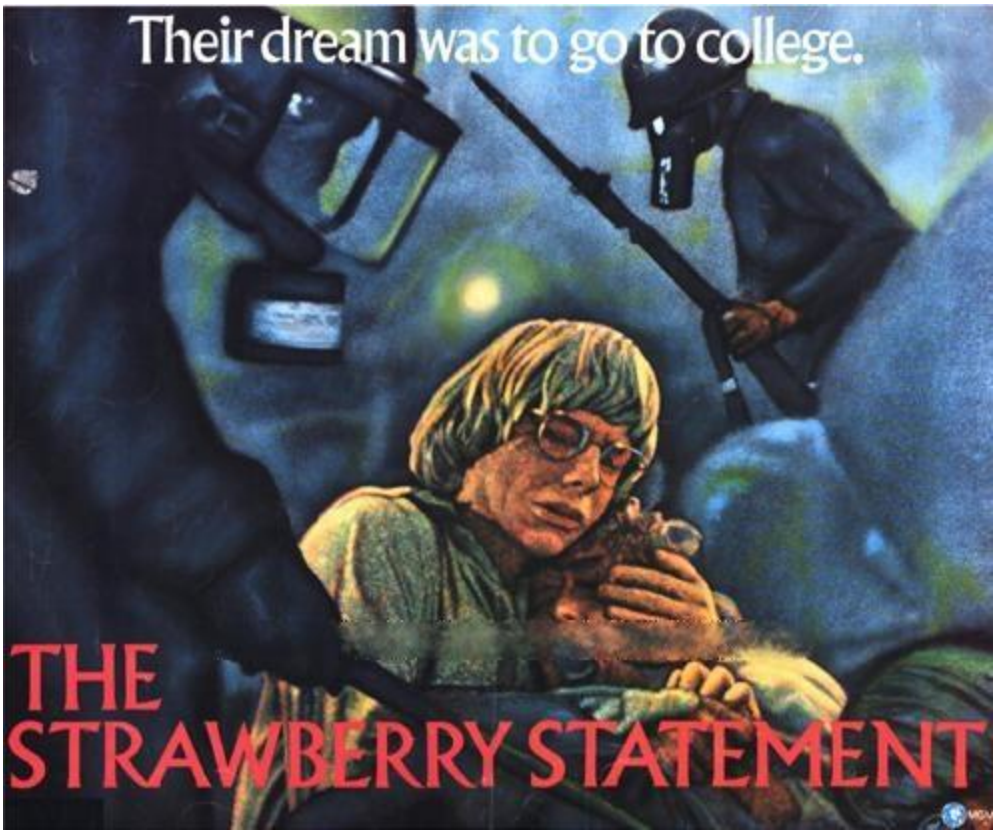
**SW:** I saw the interview on ABC from a few years ago where you came clean about that. But here's what confuses me about that whole period of your career. You said Hollywood was trying to turn you into something you weren't, a sex symbol, and you felt you were more of a character actress. But to me the roles you played in "Norwood" and "The Strawberry Statement" aren't quite ingenues. They're character roles and there's *some* quirk to them.

**KD:** Well, the hammer wasn't quite hitting my head when those two films came out. It was when I changed agents. It was right after "Strawberry Statement." I would walk into my agent's or manager's office and the first thing they would do is look me up and down. I had to go to [producer] Michael Eisner's office for "The One and Only," and he had said, "I hear Kim is fat, she needs to come into my office and see me." I had lost the weight, without pills. And I went into his office and made a 360-degree turn so he could see me, and I said, "Good afternoon," and I left. Meanwhile, he was really fat.

I'm now 36 years sober from uppers and downers, and when I went off those pills I blew up, because I hadn't eaten in so long and I hadn't slept in so long. I had won an Emmy nomination for [the 1976 miniseries] "Rich Man, Poor Man," and I didn't go because I was like 168 pounds. Today, they recognize eating disorders, they recognize when someone's in trouble. When this was going on with me, they didn't even have a name for what I was at 72 pounds. They just kept yelling at me to look at my arms and to see how skinny I was.

**SW:** At what point were you 72 pounds?

**KD:** All I can say is that when I went to Pete's memorial [in 1972], no one shot a picture of me, no one recognized me. You didn't know who I was. I don't know if you saw this movie-of-the-week called "The People" [*with William Shatner, 1972*]. You can see that I'm about to keel over.




**SW:** Tell me about "The Strawberry Statement." Do you think that's a hallmark movie given that it came out around the time of the Kent State riots?

**KD:** Kent State happened while we were doing that movie. I loved Bruce Davison and I liked [director] Stuart Hagmann. It's the movie that I looked the prettiest in. My weight wasn't really an issue because when I got divorced I lost a ton of weight. And it was a lot of fun. I didn't have to cry or anything.

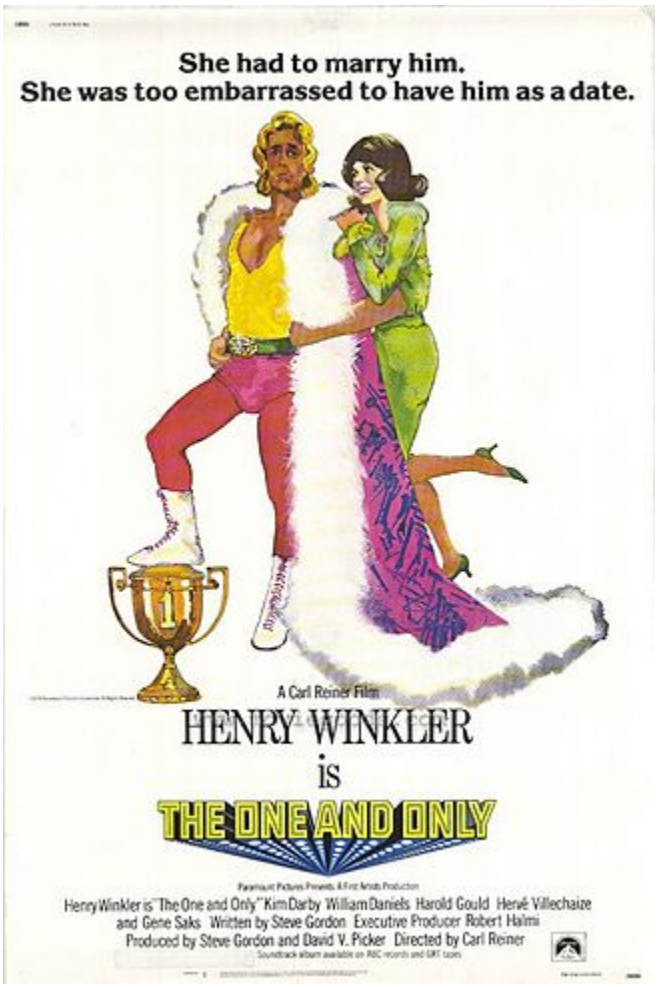
**SW:** Even the riot scene? That looked like it required a lot of emotional investment.

**KD:** That wasn't that fun. I was scared of someone losing control and getting hit. The only thing that hit me was the protective lens on the camera. It hit my face. And the operator was so sorry! But I would tell Bruce, "Hang on to me, because I'm scared."

The best article written about me was from when I was doing that movie. [*Show Magazine, February 1970; it can be read here].* The reporter [Digby Diehl] observed me and talked to me and it's very real. When I was getting a lot of press, I didn't understand their view of me. Well-scrubbed? Immaculate manners? I didn't see myself as anything special. I still have trouble with that. I don't think that's something that will be fixed.

**SW:** I know that film came out around the same time as the Elliott Gould campus comedy "Getting Straight." How would you compare the two, as revolutionary works?

**KD:** I can't speak to that, because I don't remember anything about "Getting Straight." Bruce was much more political than I was. Pete went with me up to San Francisco, and he knew more about politics than anyone. He worked during the Eugene McCarthy campaign and he got arrested and all that. He knew everything. I got that he loved me because on the way up there, I was reading the script and I saw the initials "W.A.S.P.," and I said, "Petey, what does that mean?" And he didn't get mad, he just laid it out for me.


She had to marry him.
She was too embarrassed to have him as a date.
A Carl Reiner Film
HENRY WINKLER
is
THE ONE AND ONLY
Henry Winkler is "The One and Only" Kim Darby William Daniels Harold Gould Hervé Villechaize
and Gene Saks Written by Steve Gordon Executive Producer Robert Halmi
Produced by Steve Gordon and David V. Picker Directed by Carl Reiner

**SW:** I know you took a long break from films between "Strawberry Statement" and "The One and Only." Were you off amphetamines by then?

**KD:** Yes. Carl Reiner, who directed that, he's the best person there is in the whole world.

**SW:** So what led to the long break from films after "The One and Only"?

**KD:** "The One and Only" did not do well. It tanked, very badly. And I was getting older and the business was starting to change and I was getting fewer roles. I had to read for everything, and it just started to diminish.

**SW:** Why do you think in the early 1970s that Hollywood had less obsession with actresses' weights? When and why did that start to change?

**KD:** The people that were hiring me, a lot of them were dying or had left the business. [The business] lost a lot of humanity and a lot of character. I was just lucky to be at the end of a golden era. So were a couple of my friends and they're still in the business, and every day they're devastated.

**SW:** I found an archival web site called asjcollection.com and they have all these articles from 1969 and 1970, from a magazine called Modern Movies. They are really long articles with tons of details about your various romantic relationships and they read like you talked to

a friend in confidence who then told the press. I don't get how that was ever considered journalism. There's no proof of anything.

**KD:** It wasn't, it was lies. I didn't even know those articles were coming out. I didn't talk to anybody. I mean, I talked to Time Magazine and Life. There were certain articles I'm proud of. But anyone at [Modern Movies] I didn't talk to. If you happened to be hot for a minute or two, they just glommed on to everything.

"You said you didn't like all the grease from fried bacon…so I boiled it!"

**SW:** I wanted to talk briefly about "Better Off Dead," one of my favorite films growing up.

**KD:** I had great fun on that because I didn't have to cry. I read for it a couple of times and I was very happy to get it.

**SW:** How did you meet [writer/director] "Savage" Steve Holland?

**KD:** I just went on an interview and met with him and we kind of clicked and I was very happy to get the role.

**SW:** Did you improvise some of the parts, like where you call Perrier "Peru"?

**KD:** No, we stuck close to the written text.

**SW:** Are you proud of that film's cult heritage?

**KD:** I guess so. I don't cringe when anyone asks me about it. I do when they ask about "True Grit."

**SW:** How was it working with the young John Cusack?

**KD:** He was wonderful. He was very sweet and endearing. He's a wonderful actor, a great actor.

**SW:** There were a few recent, rather obscure films of yours that I didn't get to watch. One is "Cold Ones" [*AKA "Dead Letters," from 2007*].

**KD:** That's a shame because that's where my best work is. But they didn't do it right, they didn't distribute it right. They cut it all up to pieces. It doesn't make sense because of the way they cut it. *[NOTE: this film is unavailable on Netflix and out of stock on Amazon. Darby put some clips from it in her reel, which can be seen on her personal web site, here, at the 1:57 mark; it looks like a trippy film–anything with Pantera's kick-ass cover of "Planet Caravan" on the soundtrack is at least worth watching.]*

**SW:** I flat-out could not find two of your films. One is not done yet, it's called "The Storyteller."

**KD:** I don't think that will ever be done.

**SW:** I tracked down Andrew Getty, the director, and he said he's just gotten financing for it. And the other is called "You Are So Going to Hell," I couldn't find that one.

**KD:** Thank God you couldn't! It's so terrible, so terrible! Oh God, those last two are just–oh my God. I wouldn't want anybody to see them. They're just very bad movies.

**SW:** I know you've been teaching acting in Los Angeles for awhile and I heard you were thinking of moving to Kentucky to teach there. Did that ever happen?

**KD:** No, thank God, because I think I'd be miserable there. I really want to live in New England. I've seen snow twice in my life and I'm romantic [about] those winters.

**SW:** So you're a Californian at heart?

**KD:** Well, I'm a native. I don't really like California, and I don't like L.A. at all. But I'm getting up in years and I don't think there's another move in it for me. I'd love to live in England, in the countryside. That'd be my dream.